

10 MUST-SEE CUBAN FILMS

by LaHabana.com

For Cubans, films are the most popular and media-oriented of all the art forms. Although the film industry took in 1959 with the creation of the Cuban Institute for Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC), before the first Cuban cultural law was passed in the Island (providing legal support for film production), Cubans were already making films, even when the quality did not quite match up to that of the Mexican or Argentine movie industry.

Keeping pace with the revolutionary era, changes disrupted the established order in art and as of 1960 young men of the caliber of Alfredo Guevara, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa took it upon themselves to head a movement that would go beyond the borders of this Caribbean nation to make up the New Latin American Cinema Movement.

With this in mind, LaHabana.com proposes a list of the ten must-see Cuban films in order to have a comprehensive overview of Cuban cinema. We don't mean to suggest that they are the best films but they are a representative view of movies produced on the Island.



MEMORIAS DEL SUBDESARROLLO (1968).

Directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea who is considered to be the most outstanding movie director in Cuba for his skill in taking the pulse of the nation and reflecting the complicated tapestry of cultural elements that persist in Cuban society, along with all his other work this film makes a mandatory reference to Cuban culture. Other Alea films not to be overlooked are *Las doce sillas* (1962), *La muerte de un burócrata* (1966), *La última cena* (1976) and *Fresa y chocolate* (1993).



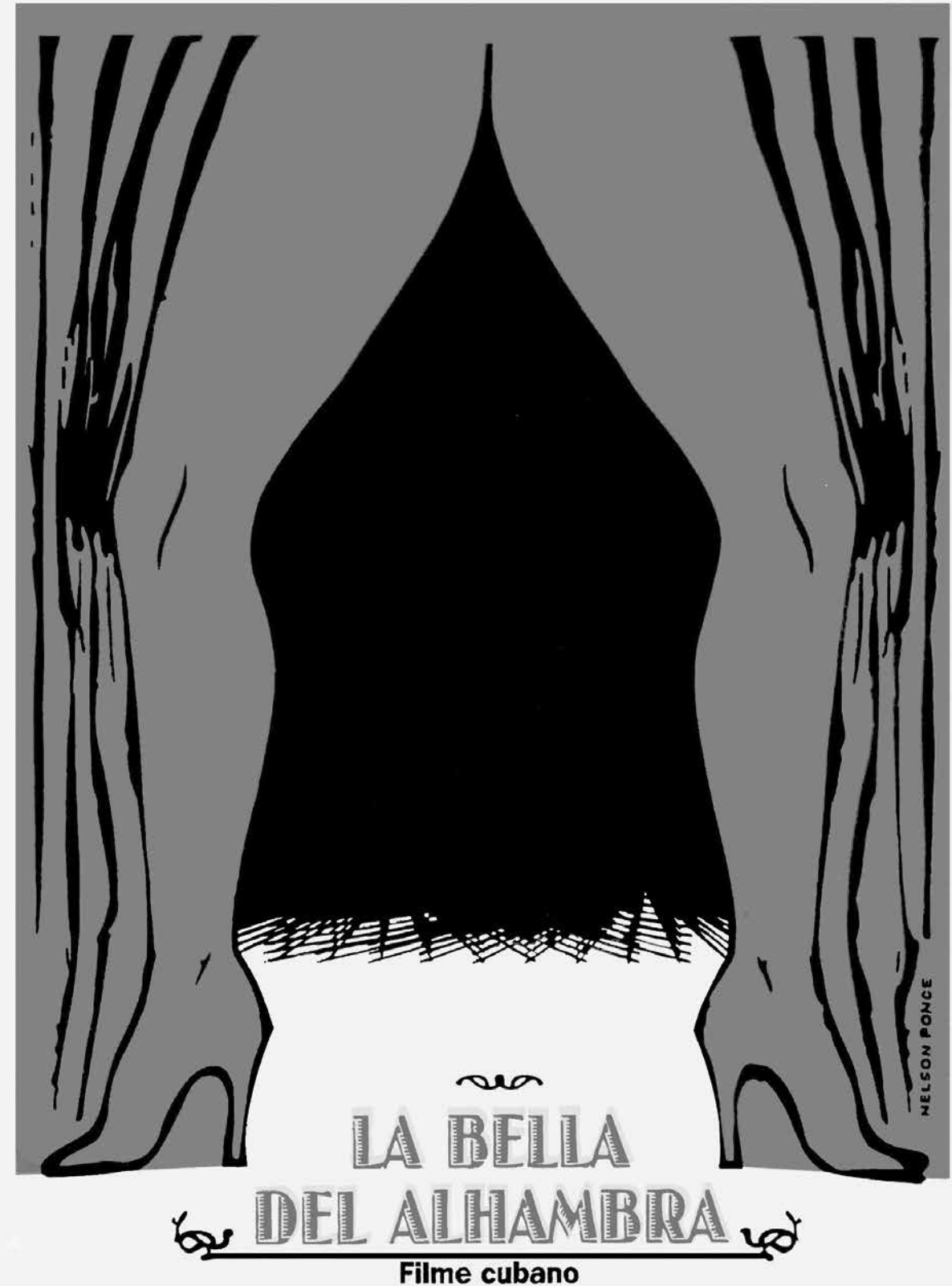


DE CIERTA MANERA (1974).

Sara Gómez is a legend within the panorama of Cuban film: the first woman to reach the ranks of director in an industry, which, until relatively a few years ago, was reticent in allowing women to step behind the cameras. We also recommend her documentary films because they provide a clear reference for her later fiction work. Sara died before being able to finish editing her first feature-length film but her teacher, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, concluded the posthumous work.

LA BELLA DEL ALHAMBRA (1990).

The best musical to have been made in Cuba bears the signature of director Enrique Pineda Barnet. Until the present, no other film has managed to attain the wit and warmth of this one; it is set in the 1920s-30s and owes a great debt to the tradition of musical theater in Cuba. From the long list of films made by Barnet, the experimental short feature Cosmorama (1964) also deserves mentioning. It is dedicated to the Cuba-based Rumanian artist Sandú Darié, a pioneer in the field of cinematography on the Island.



RETRATO DE TERESA

film cubano • dir: pastor vega • con: daisy granados • adolfo llaurado



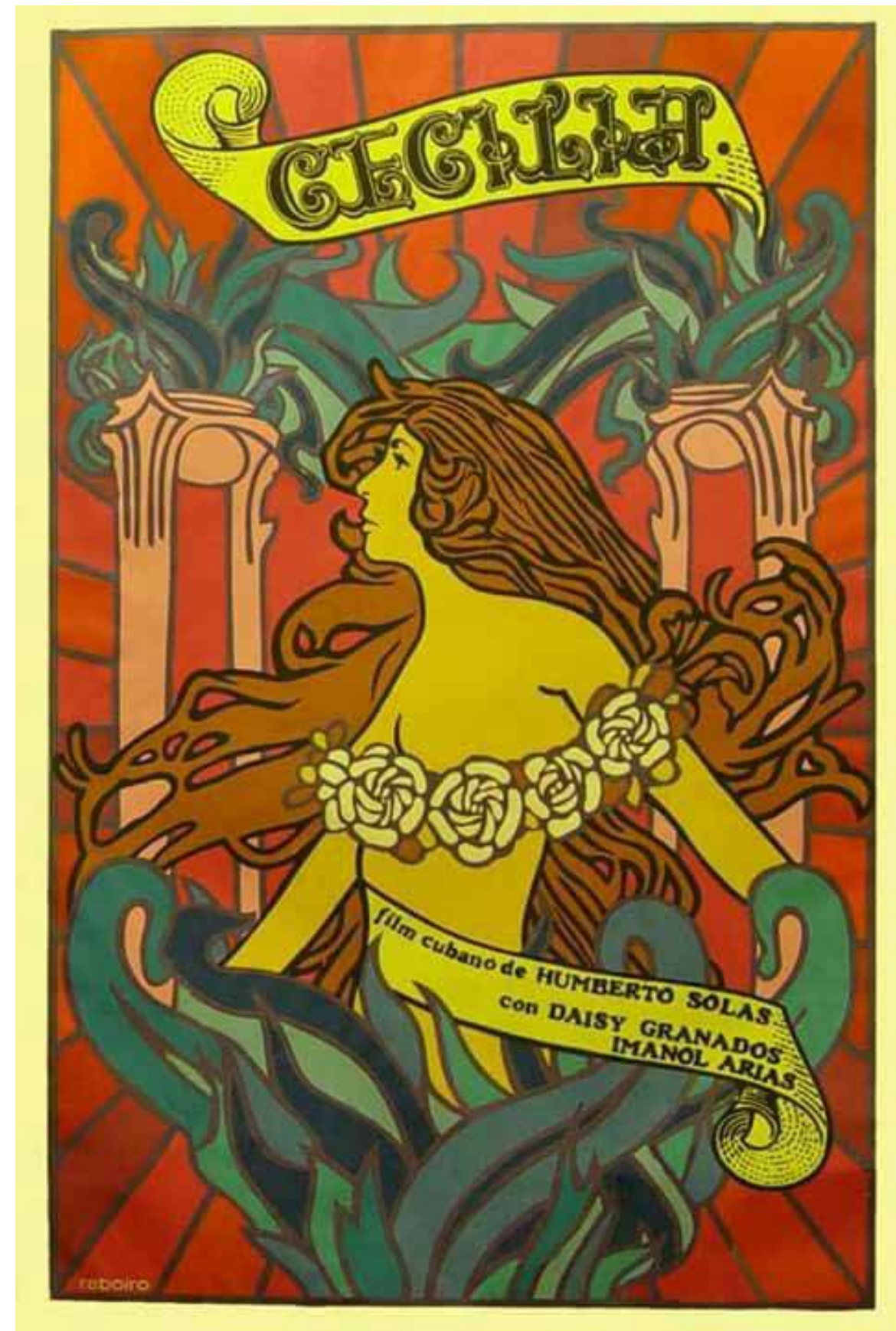
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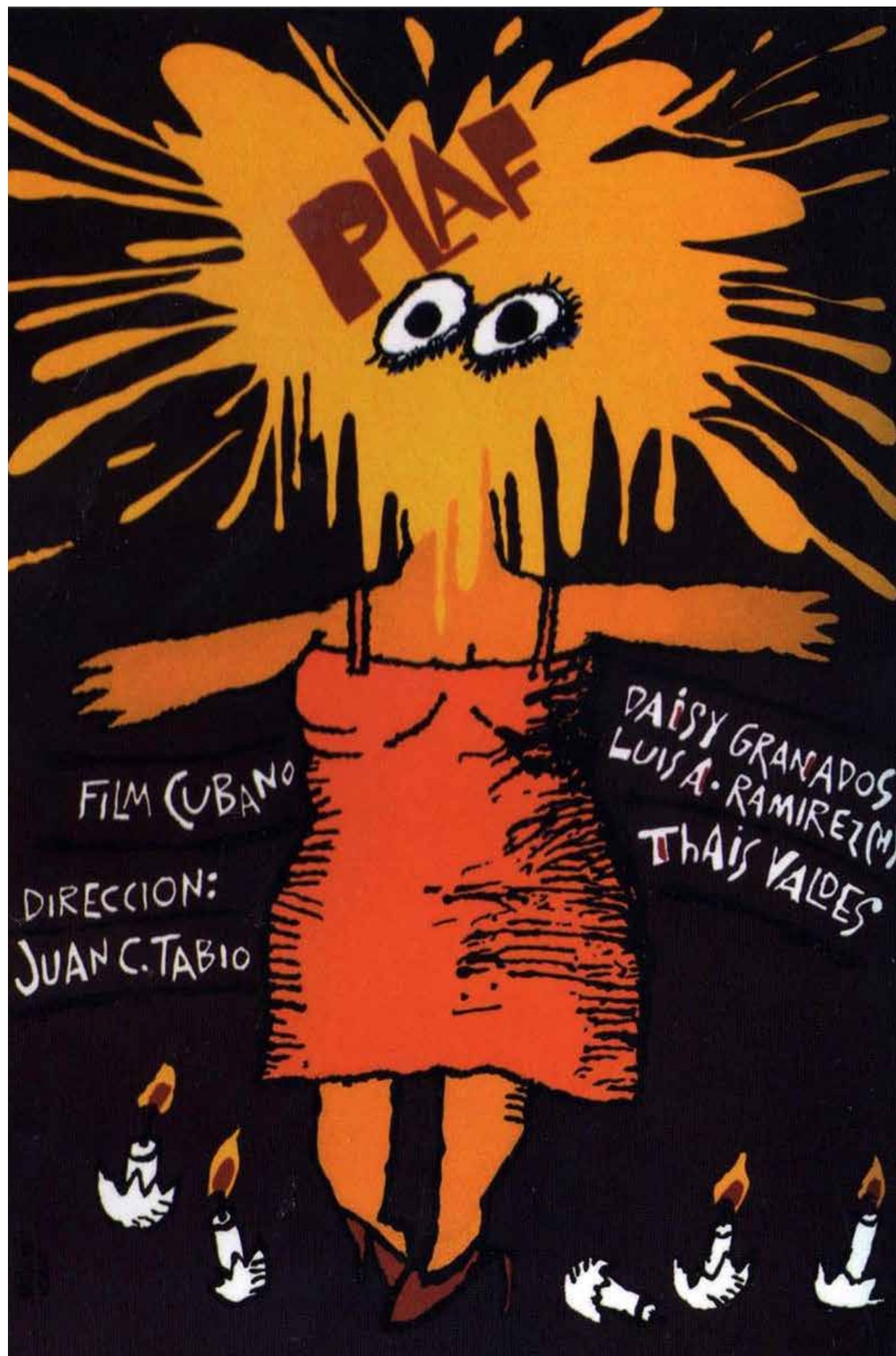
RETRATO DE TERESA (1979).

The defense of women's rights is a recurring subject in the region's media. The cultural roots of machismo are deep. At the beginning of the 1980s, Pastor Vega gave us a visceral view of the reality of a woman overwhelmed by her day-to-day milieu. Daysi Granados and Adolfo Llauro were one of the most effective artistic partnerships in Cuban cinema.

CECILIA (1982).

This film is one of the most complicated and lengthy productions ever undertaken in Cuba. Humberto Solás was a director extremely focused on his work with actors and with the art direction. His first cinematographic efforts reveal extensive use of period costumes and sets, akin to a baroque style. With the arrival of new technologies he astutely reinvented himself as a creator and espoused the esthetics of low-budget filmmaking, eventually founding the Low-Budget Film Festival of Gibara, located in the charming coastal town of the same name in eastern Cuba.





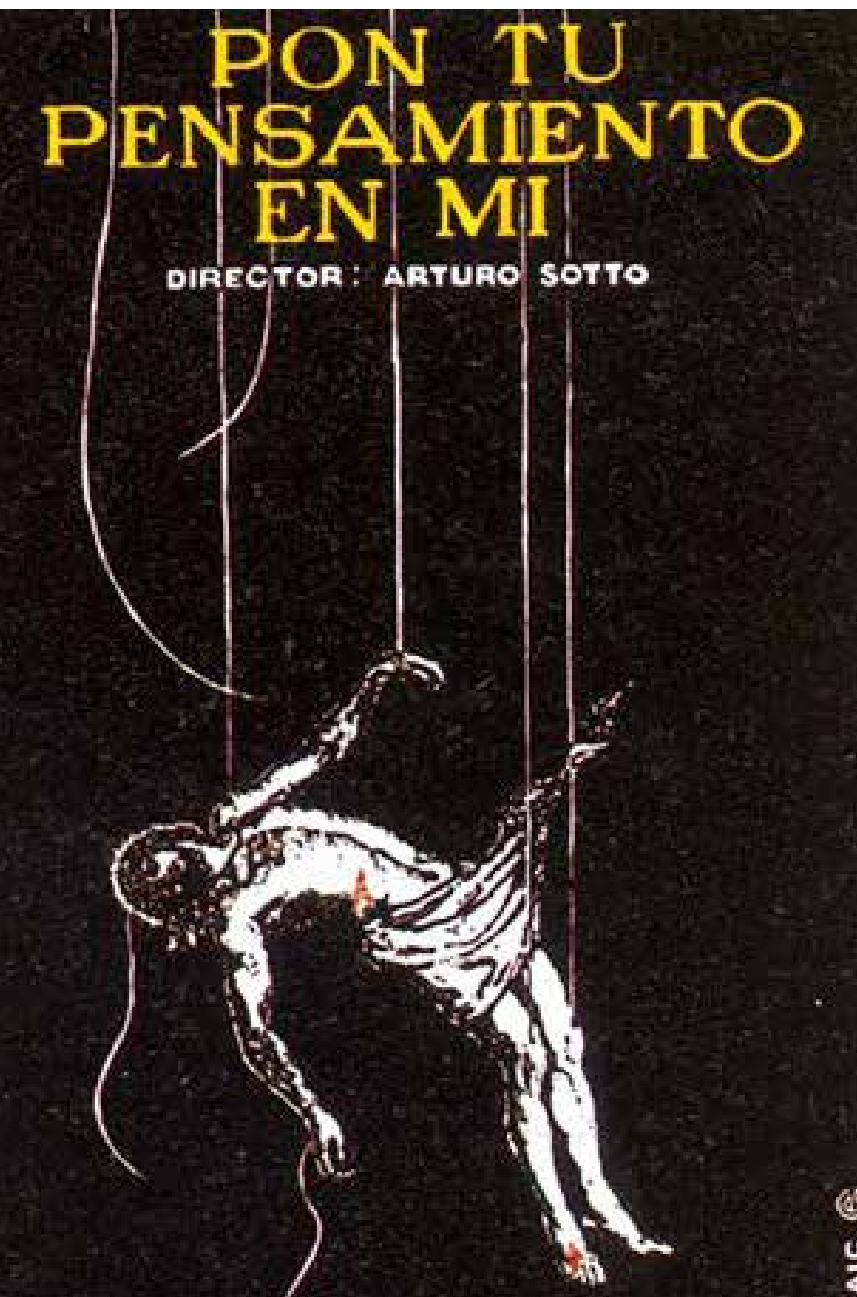
PLAFF O DEMASIADO MIEDO A LA VIDA (1988).

This is a film satirizing conventional attitudes, both those inherent in human behavior and in the cinema. Juan Carlos Tabío took on a work that speaks about cinema within cinema to provide us with proof as to what point we need story-telling, a manner of telling a tale that might as well be the tale of all our lives.

CLANDESTINOS (1987).

Few artists have undertaken an episode in the history of Cuba with as skillfully as Fernando Pérez did in this work. The armed struggle against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s is told through the lives of a young couple: it is one of the classics of Cuban cinema. Over the years Pérez has maintained his position as one of the truest voices in Cuban audiovisual creations: *Madagascar* (1994), *Suite Habana* (2003) and *José Martí: el ojo del canario* (2010) bear testimony to this.



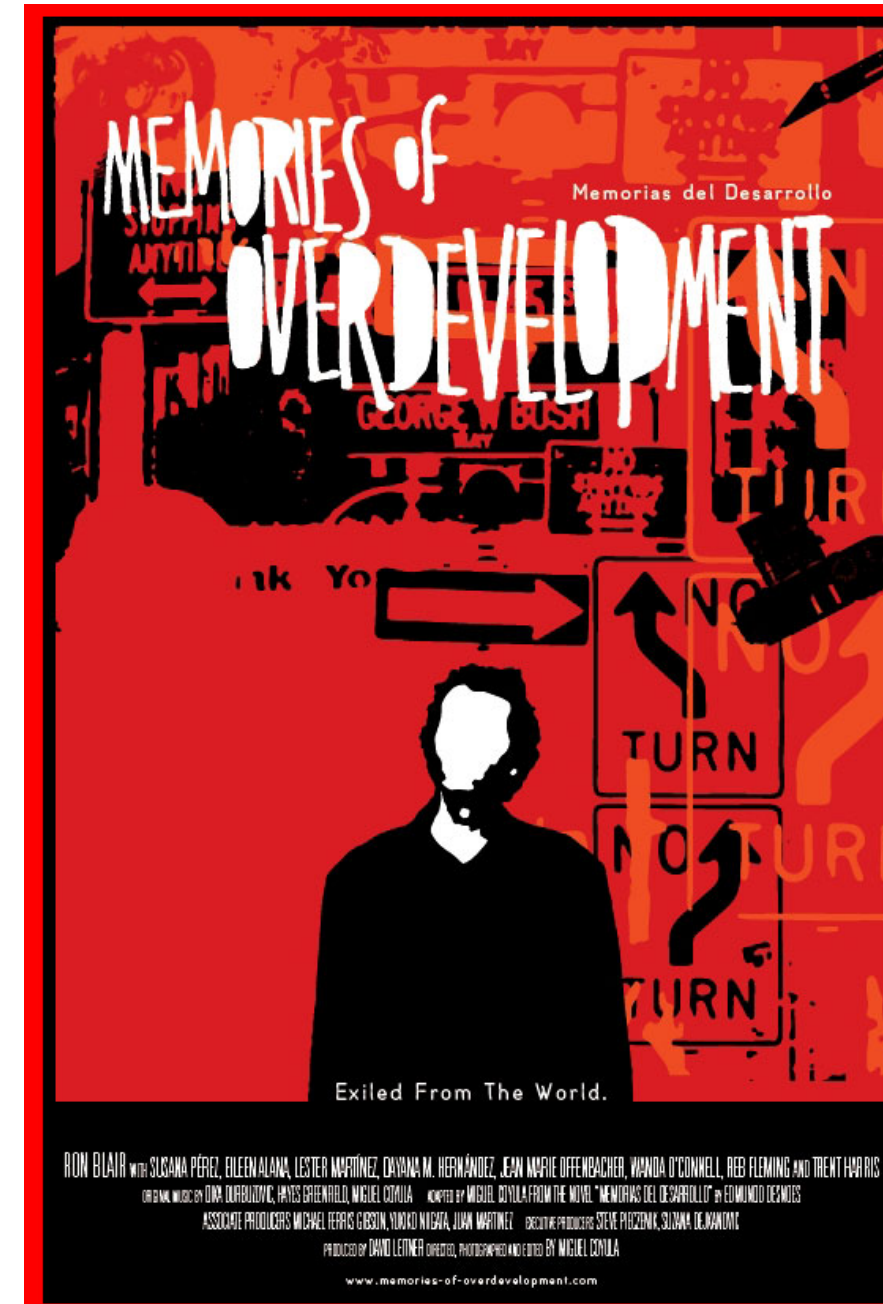


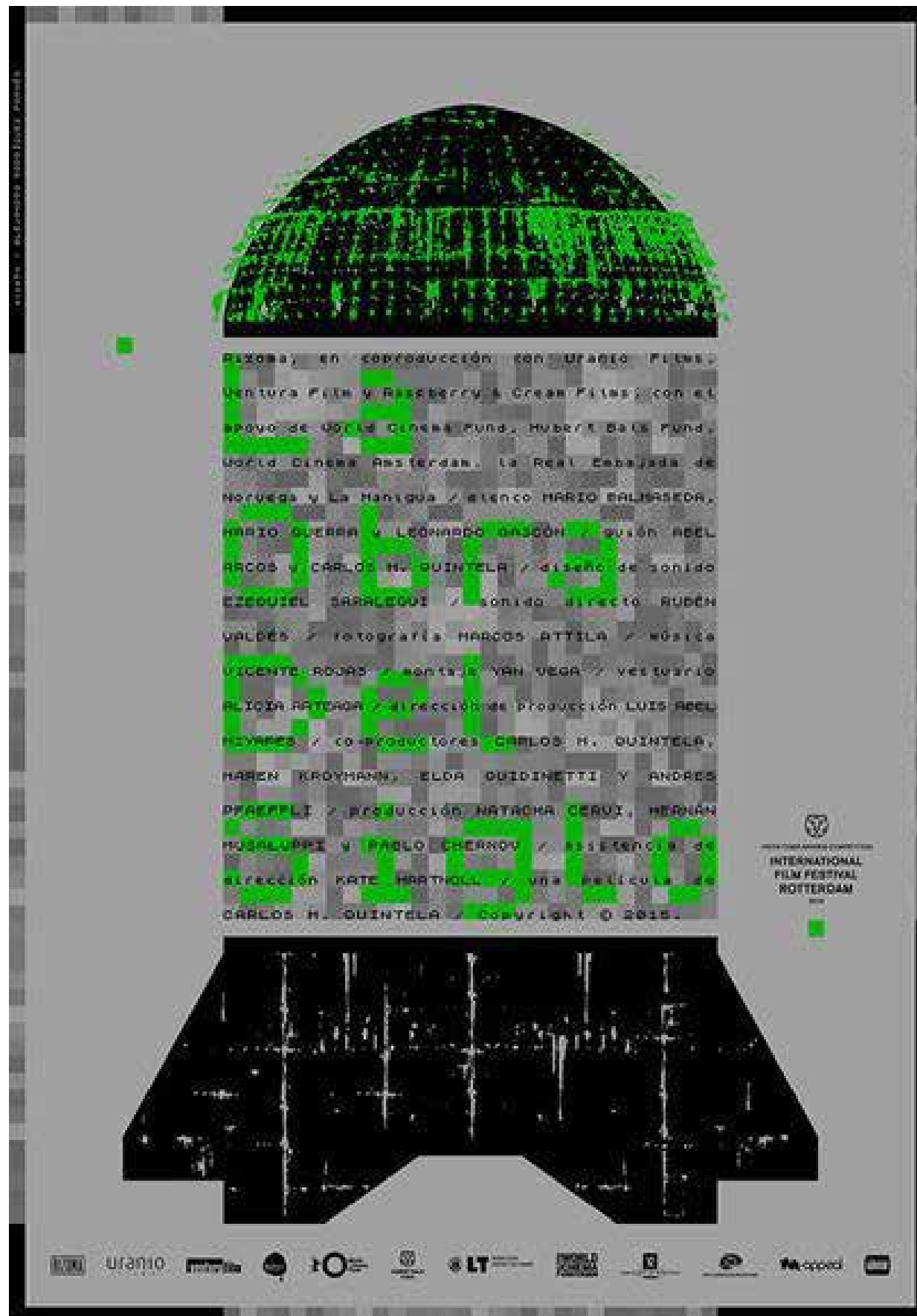
PON TU PENSAMIENTO EN MÍ (1995).

Thanks to his filmmaking debut, with this film, Arturo Sotto was considered in his day to be one of the enfants terribles of Cuban cinema. The enormous narrative and visual complexity resident in this film bring him into the vicinity of European film, contrasting with the habitual color of most Cuban work. Among other outstanding pieces in Sotto's oeuvre is *Bretón es un bebé*, a road movie revealing “magical realism” as described by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier.

MEMORIAS DEL DESARROLLO (2012).

Miguel Coyula has made one of the most experimental and daring films of the last decade. As a result of the production of this film, which took five long years to complete, this filmmaker has developed a supremely personal visual and narrative style.





LA OBRA DEL SIGLO (2014).

Hermetic, silent, strange... These are some of the adjectives that come to mind after seeing Carlos M. Quintela's second film. Belonging to the new generation of Cuban filmmakers, Quintela shot his film as an independent effort. His directorial concerns focus on universal themes such as loneliness and the alienation of the individual.